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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQ, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,
GOVERNMENT; BAGHDAD

1. SUMMARY: The major themes in the daily newspapers on June. 13 were constitution-drafting preparations and the latest developments of the security situation. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

- 1A. "The New Iraq" (Al-Sabah, 6/13)

Al-Sabah (Iraqi Media Network, non-biased) published a front-page editorial by Mohammed Abdul-Jabbar about the institutions in the new Iraq:

"We need to develop new theories and descriptions for every field of life in our new Iraq after the Iraqi people witnessed the last half century living under illegal governments and a dictatorial regime. The real meaning of "the new Iraq" depends on the success of the political and intellectual elites in developing new perceptions and their ability to implement these perceptions into new practices, traditions, and strong institutions that are active in society. This new strategy can be applied in fields of politics, economics, social relations, and the media. There are many examples of these new perceptions and institutions in the new Iraq.

One such example can be derived from the position of the armed forces in the political arena. In the new Iraq, the armed forces must report to a civilian authority. Therefore, the Minister of Defense should be a civilian with knowledge of the military. Indeed, under such a scenario, both the Army and other armed forces would fall under the authority of the civilian political leadership. In the past, when we lived under the control of a military or quasi-military government, the armed forces were always given the first and final word in all societal issues. This scenario existed even under the authority of the Baath party, which was supposed to be ruled by a civilian leadership. Although the leader of the regime was a civilian, he nonetheless often wore a military uniform and placed the highest military rank on his own shoulders.

Another area of interest in the new Iraq is the media. In the former Iraq, the Iraqi people grew accustomed to the official media, which was also known as the government's media. This official media became the lone source of news for the dictatorship. Under this scenario, the media was simply a form of propaganda that served and worshipped the ruler of the state. However, in the new, federal, constitutional, and democratic Iraq, the government will not be able to penetrate the media. Liberating the media, the financial market, and civil society from governmental authority is a basic condition for establishing democracy."

- 1B. "Good and Bad" (Az-Zaman, 6/13)

Az-Zaman (independent, lately anti-coalition) published on last page editorial by Fatih Abdul Salam about the Baath party:

"In spite of all the criticism that is being directed at Damascus, President Bashar Al-Assad seems that he has decided to go on indefinitely boasting the political name of the Baath by describing it as a movement for leading both the society and state, as stated under Article 8 of the Syrian constitution. Between Iraq and Syria, there exists only a superficial borderline. Therefore, the Baath Party conference that was held in Damascus sent a clear message against the Debaathification process in Iraq.

The Baath party that has been uprooted from power in Iraq is very similar to the Syrian Baath party that continues to rule that country. The Syrian Baath party has restricted all aspects of life according to what Damascus views as suitable to its own political situation and strategy.

However, during the Baath Party's recent conference, the Party exhibited a challenging tone to Washington as it discussed for the first time in many years cases that were previously forbidden to discuss. For example, the Party granted citizenship to 200,000 Kurds, established a law for alternative political parties, and lightened the security restrictions throughout society.

The Baath party of Syria is also considered as an ally to Tehran, which currently faces serious challenges from Washington. Indeed, it appears that the regimes in Damascus and Tehran are both caught in a standoff with Washington. Damascus has insinuated in its latest Baath conference and Tehran with its presidential elections that they are challenging Washington by making steps of undetermined reforms. But what should concern the Iraqi people is that they will likely face a future crisis with the Syrian regime because of the difference in ideology of the two countries' regimes -- regardless of whether Damascus is an ally of Tehran. We must not forget that the Baath party originated in Syria and it is possible that it will continue to flow into Iraq via the Euphrates and Tigris rivers."

JEFFREY